

[Mishewango, Miss'ippi's mah home]

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Elizabeth Burke

[?]

Folk Stuff

Mishewango, Miss'ippi 's mah home. Been grievin' 'bout it sence ah come 'Way fum there. Ooeeee, yes, Lawd, been agrievin' deep an' long.

Man, ah had mah forty acres an' a steer an'a harness; a leather harness almos' good ez if 't were new boughten. Ah had all o' that an' a plow besides. Had Willa May, she mah wife, t' he'p me.

Pappy he gi' me mah lan'. He sign it off t' me an' went on away down t' Red Bay, Alabama. Fo' he go he said t' me,

“Son, you's a young 'un f' t' have whut ah jus' done give yo'. Ah know you full o' devilment, too, f' sure, ah knows dat. Howsome-ever if'n you keep a bumpin' yo' back in de fiel' ah know dat devilment goin' t' wear itse'f plum' into de groun'. Jus' lis'en at d' preacher an' grow de cotton an' don' git too big fo' yo' brithces. Trus' de Lawd.”

Ah wuz raise in de chu'ch yet 'n still ah never give it much min' a'ter mah lil boy he died. Willa May she let de preacher come every day an' pray fo' 'im, an' 'noint 'im wid oil an' all.

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Said 2 'is word an' 'is hand on d' bible, swore he'd save 'im through faith. Mah lil boy he died. Never did b'lieve no more, but pappy he call it devilment t' do so.

But, Lawd, Lawd, ah did grow de cotton! Man, ah worked lak a fury on mah lan', 'til ah had me th' money fer t' build th' bigges' house in Mishewango county. Had us fo' rooms an' a front po'ch. Had honeysuckle flowrin' roun' de front an' green garden in de back.

Ah got me some sheep, an' Willa May, she card them wools, an' shrink an' comb 'em, an' spin an' weave, 'til ah do declare we had no need o' store clothes nohow. Willa May seed t' that, an' we never in a push f' material; work jeans er Sunday jacket neither one.

Kep' on, jus' kep' on agoin' fine an' dandy.

Ah useter git mah cotton ginned an' sold an' then git me a job aworkin' f' wages in a liquor still roundabout mah farm. 'Twere fer th' makin' o' brandy. A good brandy take a heap o' makin' an' ah sho' knowed how.

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(Ooooo, now, ah lak t' f'got t' tell 'bout mah bath tub.) Had th' onliest bath tub in all o' Mishewango county. Ah'm uh tellin' yo' true! Onliest one!

Mos' folks they got to wash theyse'ves in d' creek cause in dat day copper an' tin tubs they too much money an' moughty few folks could 'ford to git 'em. An' ah couldn't neither.

Come a day an' ah set down an' ah thought it out. Willa May she make me saw 'er a barrel in two, you know, an' she use 'em fo' wash d' clothes an' all. Some folks use er tub lak that fer t' take er bath in an' Willa May she did too. Ah never did cause tweren't big enough f' mah big toe, an' ah know it.

But ah thought it out an' ah thought o' poplar. Ah made me a bath tub, made it outen poplar tree wood, an' ah stuffed de chinks wid cotton, good. Everybody know poplar wood

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swells do yo' wet it wid hot water. That tub it swell an' tighten up so, ain' a drap o' water kin drip th'ough.

Ah'm a man size, grown ,an' ah been moughty proud 4 o' that tub. 'Twuz man size, you see, an' ah knowed they didn' nobody else this side o' th' county have one lak it.

But it done caused me t' be run away fum home. Ah wuz goin' along fine 'til ah had me that tub an' then trouble come an' come fas'. Comin' lak a mornin' star an' won't be hindered.

Got t' fist fightin' one time. 'Tweren't nuthin' t' git de law over. Man ah fought with, even, can't call his name, disremembers ontirely. How some ever de law come up an' ah got drug t' de courthouse.

Nobody in de courthouse cep'in de judge an' deputy whut brung me in.

Judge said,

“Son Johnson, you been fist fightin'. But yo' aint got t' pay a fine dis time. Ah hear tell ez yo' got de onlies' bath tub in Mishewango county. Ah say yo' mus' haul that bath tub o' yourn ovuh here t' d' courthouse. Dis county court sho' need a man size bath tub.”

He grin an' went t' chawin' at 'is t' bacco plug.

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Ah knowed he fixin' t' git mah tub f' hisse'f, an' yo' know ah got hot! Ooeee, ah did get hot! Devil had holt o' mah tongue dat minit.

Said to de judge,

“Judge, ah ain' goin' t' do it, naw, suh! Ain' f' none but me, mah tub. Ah done built it.”

Judge git mad. Said,

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"Nigger, yo' better min' yo' talk! Don't, ah'll whup yo' mahse'f, til you' tail's adraggin' lak er sick fox 'thout er hole!"

Then , 'fo' Gawd, he come up close, an' squirt 'is t'bacco juice in mah face.

Ooeee, devil got me sho'. Ah jumped 'im, man ah did, an' tellin' yo', we had a fight! Ah mean we had a fight. Didn' keer then if he wuz a dog, jus' so he come ahowlin'. Ah come moughty near scrougin' de eyes outen 'is head. Well ah bit 'is thumb off an' that finish 'im. That do fer 'im.

Well ah started studyin' 'bout gittin' fum there right quick.

Deputy he scared he git some o' th' same ah give de judge. Ah tole 'im 'tweren't no skin offen his back ce'p if he make or move t' come git me. He stay 6 right there, he never made a move.

Left dat courthouse in a moughty big rush, an' knowed then ah'd hare t' leave mah home.

Howsomever, did get word t' Willa May, th'ough mah cousin, an' she tooken mah axe an' make kindlin' outer de bath tub whut ah made, fo' she lef'.

Yes, Lawd, been grievin' evuh since. 'Fo' de Lawd, ah have!

Finish

Material gotten from Son Johnson's daughter, Elizabeth Johnson, living at 1521 No. Campbell 2nd floor, rear. Elizabeth comes from Red Bay, Alabama, having been born after her father left Mishewango. Personal friend of the writer.

B. Burke